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Georgia

INTRODUCTION

Although in 1798 the Georgia Constitution prohibited slave importation directly from Africa and in 1808 the Federal Constitution made the African slave trade unlawful, the favorable topography of the Georgia coast encouraged smuggling. The tidewater coastline and large navigable rivers penetrating for miles into the interior facilitated the landing of cargo. Consequently illegal slave traffic flourished in this region until 1858, when the slave ship *Wanderer* landed its cargo on Georgia soil.

Newspaper advertisements indicate that a large proportion of these early cargoes came from the Gambia River and Niger River sections; later the coast from the Congo River to the southern end of Portuguese West Africa was the base of operation. Accounts of various explorers' travels through Africa at that time, however, indicate that native traders frequently collected their slave cargoes from interior sections and shipped them from the west coast of Africa. Although to the white man, Negroes of an average cargo might have seemed similar in type, it is possible that in many instances they were brought from widely separated regions.

The coastal Negroes of Georgia are sometimes called Gullahs, although in general parlance the term is applied only to the Negroes of coastal South Carolina. Because of the similarity in type and speech, however, it is sometimes loosely extended to include the Georgia coastal Negroes as well. The place name, Geechee, derived from Ogeechee River, near Savannah, is also used locally to designate the Negroes of this district.

The coastal plantations that absorbed the slave traffic were remote from one another. The jungle swamps of the low country and the wide expanses of water separating the coastal islands made communication difficult among the plantation laborers of this section. With the continued arrival of Africans to these isolated plantation communities, native ceremonies and customs were renewed or exchanged.

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115 of schooling as evinced by her diction. She is a devout member of the Adventist Church, her day of worship coming on Saturday instead of the customary Sunday, a day observed and anticipated by the average Negro.

791 "Silvia Higgins," Esther testified, "wuz a medium. She
795 talked with spirits all huh life.[50a, b] She used the rapping signal. I myself have seen the work and acts of spirits. I've seen cheahs and tables move about a room. And I've seen a woman and a boy come intuh my yahd and then disappeah, and I know that the woman wuz dead. The boy wuz not dead but wuz not anywheah in this vicinity. Silvia Higgins wuz my mothuh. She has been dead thirty-two yeahs."

115 One of the most interesting Negroes in this settlement is Tonie Houston,* an old preacher, extremely gracious of manner and eager to be of help.

"I bin yuh in dis town fo dey wuz no big buildings an duh streets wuz all dut an deah wuz no pavement."

829 "Do you remember any of the people brought over from Africa?" we asked.

(551) "Yas, I know heaps ub um. Deah wuz 'Golla' John Wiley, Golla' Jim Bayfield—he wuz bought by Mahse Chahles Lamar, and he sole im to Mr. McMullen. Den deah wuz 'Golla' Jack, 'Golla' Tom, 'Golla' Silvie, 'Golla' Chahles Carr, 'Golla' Bob, Chahlotte, Cain, an Jeanette, an 'Golla' Alice. Dey wuz all bought by Mr. McMullen."

(101) When asked the meaning of so many "Gollas," he replied, "All duh people wut come frum Africa aw obuhseas wuz
(192) call 'Golla,' and dey talk wuz call 'Golla' talk." His knowledge of their language, gained by association with the Africans, was scant. Among the words he remembered were *musungo* tobacco, *mulafo* whiskey, and *sisure* chicken. A cow was called *gombay* [25r] and a hog *gulluh*.

(322) To questions regarding the utensils, such as buckets, tubs,

* *Tonie Houston, Tatemville.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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Introduction

539 [i bɪnə dɹiŋk di βɔrə
ɛn i gɔt ɹait ɸə ste iə]

She has partaken of the water,
and she has the right to live here.

•101 The life-styles, tales, and language peculiarities captured in this book were unearthed during more than nine years of research with the Gullah- or Geechee-speaking Sea Islanders of Georgia and South Carolina and three months of field work in Nigeria, West Africa. Like 121 most Americans, I was in total ignorance of the existence of the Sea Islands for many years—in my case, until 1972. Once I heard about them, no amount of library research and no amount of reading about the Sea Islanders could quench my desire actually to see for myself how they had managed to retain so many more remnants of their West African ancestry than African-Americans in other parts of the country.

133 On my first trip to the Sea Islands, in 1973, I remember crossing a bridge leading from Charleston to James Island, crossing another one 491 from James Island to Johns Island, and then another one from Johns Island to Wadmalaw. On Wadmalaw the scenery changed drastically, and the farther I drove along the narrow, winding road into the depths of this remote island, the more unusual my surroundings became: hanging moss; dense woodlands; flat, "boggy" swamps; and the musty, sweet aroma of ocean air. A person could get lost forever on these islands, I remember thinking. As I would later learn, it was this very remoteness which contributed to the continuation of the African-derived culture of the Sea Island area.

123 I turned around a deep bend in the road and continued on, ultimately

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31. See Cronise and Ward, *Cunnie Rabbit*.

32. See Finnegan, *Limba Stories;* and Cronise and Ward, *Cunnie Rabbit*.

33. See Harris, *Nights with Uncle Remus;* and Martha Warren Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories* (New York: American Folklore Society, 1924).

34. See Dorson, *African Folklore;* and Parsons, *Folklore of the Sea Islands*.

Chapter 4

•101 175 567

1. On *Gullah* see Wood, *Black Majority*, p. 335. For *Geechee* see Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, p. 194. As many as 70 percent of the slaves brought to the Sea Islands may have come from Angola. As far back as 1822, the Charleston City Council regarded the word *Gullah* as a corruption of *Angola*. John G. Williams wrote in the *Charleston Sunday News*, 10 February 1895: "Gullah is very probably a corruption of Angola, shortened to Gola, a country of West Africa, and part of Lower Guinea, from which a great many negroes were brought to this country in the days of the slave trade. I remember hearing the old plantation negroes before the war speak of one as a 'Gullah nigger' and another as a 'Guinea nigger.'" When members of the Georgia Writers Project of 1940 asked an elderly man if he could remember any of the people brought over from Africa, he replied: "'Yas, I know heaps ub um. Deah wuz "Golla" John Wiley, "Golla" Jim Bayfield—he wuz bought by Mahse Charles Lamar, and he sole im to Mr. McMullen. Den deah wuz "Golla" Jack, "Golla" Tom, "Golla" Silvie, "Golla" Charles Carr. . . . All duh people wut come frum Africa aw obushseas wuz call '"Golla," and dey talk wuz call "Golla" talk'" (*Drums and Shadows*, p. 66).

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2. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*.

823

3. Water is symbolic of life, happiness, and goodwill on the Sea Islands, and water from certain areas on the islands is felt to have curative properties. Thus Francis's reply is not without some merit.

197 113

4. For early studies on Gullah see George Phillip Krapp, "The English of the American Negro," *American Mercury* 2 (June 1924): 190–95; Reed Smith, *Gullah*, Bulletin of the University of South Carolina, no. 190 (Columbia: *University of South Carolina Press*, 1926); and H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: Supplement II* (New York: Knopf, 1942).

5. Ambrose E. Gonzales, *The Black Border* (Columbia, S.C.: The State Co., 1922), p. 10.

6. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, p. 296.

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7. To take one interesting example of nonstandard speech, Ian Hancock has recently informed me that an African-Seminole variety of English is spoken in Oklahoma and Texas. This mixture is unsurprising: Africans and Indians have coexisted since the beginning of foreign migrations into America.

8. See Irma Cunningham, "A Syntactic Analysis of Sea Island Creole (Gullah)." (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan; 1970); Nichols, *Linguistic Change in Gullah;* Joyner, "Slave Folklife," or *Down by the Riverside*, pp. 196–224; and Jones-Jackson, "The Status of Gullah."

9. See DeCamp, "Toward a Generative Analysis."

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Prologue

The coastal region of the South Carolina Lowcountry, bounded on the north by Georgetown and on the south by Port Royal and St. Helena Sound, was the land of the Gullah slave population. Bordering on these coastal lowlands, stretching out into the arms of the sea, halfway between Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia are a fringe of fertile islands. The largest of these islands are Port Royal, Paris, Ladies, Hilton Head, and St. Helena.[1] Here indigo and the once famous long staple cotton were cultivated by the most isolated Gullah slaves, who also created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African-American culture. Because their isolation precluded direct exposure to mass Euro-American influences, Sea Island Gullahs offer evidence of significant combinations of traditional retentions, American acculturation, and intergroup socialization.

The name "Gullah" is generally believed to be a shortened form of Angola. Africans from the Kongo-Angola region, Bantu-speaking peoples, were imported in large numbers during Carolina's early colonial history.[2] As early as 1742, the *South Carolina Gazette* advertised for a runaway slave called "Golla Harry." One of Denmark Vesey's coconspirators, "Gullah Jack," was reportedly born in Angola. An entry of the Charleston City Council for 1822 refers to "Gullah Jack" and his "Gullah or Angola Negroes." The Vesey trial record, however, simply refers to Jack as an African. Winifred Vass, in *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States*, points out that the ruler of the Mbundu nation in Central Africa was called the Ngola, from which the Portuguese named the colony. Vass suggests that this name was used by Europeans to refer to

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slaves from the Angolan ports.[3] Her theory implies an ethnic identification retained by BaKongo peoples.

Another theory also suggests that the name was group-initiated, yet from a different ethnic source. "Golla" was used in the eighteenth century while "Gullah" was a nineteenth-century term for slaves in the coastal region of South Carolina. A very large group of Africans from the Liberian hinterland were called Golas, sometimes spelled "Goulah." Chapter 1 discusses their importation into the Carolina Lowcountry and Georgia in large numbers during a period of rapid growth and settlement. One early twentieth-century white South Carolinian, Reed Smith, wrote extensively about Gullah dialect, maintaining that the term refers to the Golas of Liberia. His suggestion alone proves nothing. But further research demonstrates its plausibility, or at least the possibility of two complimentary original derivations. During the colonial era, Africans from the Windward Coast (Sierra Leone and Liberia) entered Charleston and heavily contributed to the coastal and Sea Island population. Golas and neighboring Gizzis (also called Kizzis or Giggis) were two of the largest African ethnic groups preyed upon by domineering Mende, Vai, Mandingas, and others. Methodist missionaries went to Liberia in the 1840s to convert the "Goulah nation." The spelling of Gullah and Goulah have obvious similarities. Additionally, missionaries were struck by "Goulah" Africans' use of English, as Northerners were by the Gullah speech. "The native Africans never use the personal pronoun of the third person feminine," wrote one missionary in 1843. ". . . it is always 'he, him.' " Similarly, Elizabeth Botume wrote of her initial incomprehension of the Gullah dialect during the Civil War, stating that her head grew "dizzy" trying to understand it. Worst of all for Botume was the confusion regarding family relations: "I never knew whether they were talking of boys or girls. They spoke of all as 'him.' "[4]

Even more interesting observations come from Lorenzo Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*.[5] There are a number of problems with Turner's study. Yet even critics admit that in a "fair number of instances the derivation and meaning found for a Gullah name are reasonably convincing."[6] Turner includes in his list of African words *gala (gola, gula)* which he takes to mean "Gullah, a dialect spoken by Negroes in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, one who speaks Gullah." He does not list an African homologue for *gala*, but defines its African equivalent as "gola (. . . gula, gura) a Liberian tribe and its language . . . also see ngola, a

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tribe in the Hamba basin of Angola."[7] Hence Turner allows for both possibilities in the origin of the term. Linguist P. E. Hair observes that, given this Gola association, it is curious that Turner found almost no Gola language terms. Hair has another insight. It is generally conceded that Turner may have exaggerated the amount of African influence in Gullah, but also that he "conclusively" demonstrated it had "more" 'Africanisms' than any other dialect in the United States. But, says Hair, it has gone unnoticed that "a remarkably large proportion of the 'Africanisms' cited by Turner came from the Sierre Leone region." Of the 3,500 words listed by Turner and used in Gullah, only 500 are "working vocabulary" terms with known meaning. Of the latter number, 350 are terms used in conversation. The Sierra Leone proportion is about 20 percent. Also, the shortest list is terms from Gullah stories, songs, and prayers. There are 85 such terms and 63 percent are Mende and 21 are Vai. Says Hair, "thus the Sierra Leone region makes virtually a clean sweep of this list."[8]

Of the 3,000 personal names with "suggested" derivations, Hair states that even here the Sierra Leone influence is prominent. He suggests that Turner missed other ethnic identifications of Windward Coast origin (Bullom, Limba, Kissi, and Gola for instance), because "no dictionary or informant was available."[9] This indicates a greater Upper Guinea influence than scholars have previously recognized. Most have concentrated on the Kongo-Angolan influence, as indeed from first appearances, does Lorenzo Turner.[10]

African-American slaves who inhabited the Georgia coast were called Geechees, but had essentially the same culture as Gullahs. Linguistically speaking, Turner uses both terms interchangeably. He lists *gisi* as Mende and defines it as "a language and tribe of the Kissy country (Liberia)."[6] Both Golas and Gizzis shared the same cultural institutions—Poro and Sande—as indeed did the Mende, Vai, Bullom, and others over a wide geographical area. Today *Geechee* is a folk term, generally used as a provocation. In this context it means "country." The term is generally used between intimates in a joking manner, or intended as a challenge to fight.[11]

One final point on linguistic considerations regarding Gullah origins. Several Gullah personal names identified by Turner and listed with West African equivalents relate to Windward Coast secret societies. For example, Gullah *beri*, and *berimo* are listed as Vai. The former Gullah name refers to ". . . a branch of the society known as pora . . . a 'ceremonial

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27. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness, Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), 46–59.

28. Ibid.; Arthur P. Mendel, ed., *Essential Works of Marxism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 15–16.

29. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972 ed.), 200–201.

30. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 329–88, 441.

31. Ibid., xvii.

32. John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, No. 5, 1974), 2–3.

Prologue

1. Mason Crum, *Gullah, Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940), 3, 19–22, 78; Guion G. Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 112, 130; Paul Quattlebaum, *The Land Called Chicora* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1958), 86–88.

2. The spelling of Kongo with a K instead of C is used by some Africanists. It refers to the traditional, unitary civilization and way of life of BaKongo peoples. The C spelling represents the political shift that occurred with white colonial penetration and partition in Central Africa. Traditional Kongo civilization includes modern Bas-Zaire, neighboring Cabinda, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, and Northern Angola. The ancient civilization was once under the united suzerainty of the kingdom of Kongo. The language is KiKongo, although dialects vary widely in this Bantu-speaking world of Africa. The numerous ethnic groups and some neighboring ones share cultural and religious traditions. They also share memories of the trials and tears left in the wake of centuries of transatlantic trade in slaves. John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, No. 5, 1974), 1–3; Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 27; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 103; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 11; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 30–36, 44–45, 134–35, 411.

3. *SCG*, March 27, 1742; Reed Smith, "Gullah," *A Reprint of Bulletin #190 of the University of South Carolina* (Columbia: State Printing Co., 1926), 3–4; Winifred Vass, *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1979), 31.

4. Smith, "Gullah," 3–4; *SCA*, December 22 and 29, 1843; Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1968; repr. from 1893 ed.), 54, 57. Peter Wood also suggests that perhaps Gullah derived from a "multiple etymology." See *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974), 172, n. 12.

5. Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969; repr. from 1949 ed.).

6. See reviews and discussions by Raven I. McDavid, Jr., *Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America* 26 (April–June, 1950): 323–32, and Morris Swadish, *Word: Journal*

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of the Linguistic Circle of New York 7 (April, 1951): 82–83; P. E. Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in the Gullah Dialect of American English," *Sierra Leone Language Review* no. 4 (1965): 79–84; Frederick G. Cassidy, "The Place of Gullah," *American Speech* 55 no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 3–14.

7. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 194. Gullahs often referred to themselves as "countrymen," as a way of identifying themselves as African-born. When asked what their language was, they would reply, "the way we talk." Mary A. Twining and Keith E. Baird, "Introduction to Sea Island Folklife," *Journal of Black Studies* 10, no. 4 (June, 1980): 398; Donald R. Kloe, "Buddy Quow: An Anonymous Poem in Gullah-Jamaican Dialect Written Circa 1800," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (June, 1974): 82–84.

8. Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in Gullah," 79–81.

9. Ibid., 83.

10. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, passim; Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*; Wood, *Black Majority*. Wood does suggest, however, that the Windward Coast slaves had a special appeal and significance because South Carolinians recognized their familiarity with rice, the colony's main export. The Windward Coast was also called the Grain Coast and in specific areas the Rice Coast. As Wood observes, "Throughout the era of slave importation in South Carolina references can be found concerning African familiarity with rice." Wood, *Black Majority*, 59–60. Daniel Littlefield further explored Wood's idea and provides an exception to the general emphasis on Kongo-Angolan influences. See his *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Another important author, the late Walter Rodney, also early recorded the significance of Upper Guinea in the transatlantic trade, although Rodney was not specifically writing about South Carolina. See his *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

11. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 91, 194; Twining and Baird. "Introduction to Sea Island Folklife," 397–98.

12. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 63, 151, 189; see Chapters 2 and 9.

13. Ibid., 136, 138; Wood, *Black Majority*, 131, 302, 334–39; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, Chapter 2, 107, 108; Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in Gullah," 83; Kloe, "Buddy Quow," 87; Cassidy. "Place of Gullah," 7–14. Linguist Ian Hancock believes that KiKongo speech "cannot be counted as a contributing factor to Gullah," despite the large numerical representation, because BaKongo peoples did not go through a creolization process. He argues, even more forcefully than Hair, for Upper Guinea Coast influences since some of these Africans already spoke a creole because of contact with whites on the Guinea Coast. While assessment of Upper Guinea linguistic impact appears sound, Turner, Cassidy and others continue to support significant Kongo and Gold Coast influences. Ian F. Hancock, "Gullah and Barbadian—Origins and Relationships," *American Speech* 55 no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 27–32.

14. Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 106, 154, 161; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958 repr. from 1941 ed.); Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, Chapter 2; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 151–57, 178–203.

15. Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

16. Arthur Sumner to Lt. Joseph Clark, January 23, 1863, Penn School Papers, vol. 4, SHC.

17. Diary of William F. Allen, 25, 44, 83–84, in William F. Allen Family Papers, 1775–

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INTRODUCTION

177 178 (126) IT HAS BEEN more than twenty years since *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* was first published—twenty-three years since the material was recorded and the original photographs were taken. In some ways the world pictured in those photographs no longer exists. When you visit the island now, you are immediately aware of change. There are many more houses and signs of prosperity. Most of the older, weathered, wooden homes are gone, replaced by brick or newer wood ones. The two main roads are heavily traveled now, primarily by people on their way to the two resort communities adjacent to Johns Island—Kiawah and Seabrook. On the major crossroads there are small shopping centers and in the summer months produce stands to market vegetables to resort-goers.

464 212 In the early 1960s the islanders were hard-pressed people—maids, cooks, farmhands, and laborers. The level of education for most was quite low and yet we found an insight and wisdom about life, and particularly a richness of folk expression, 114 that was inspirational. Before Guy came to Johns Island, he had traveled and worked in many parts of the South. A musician with training in folklore, he had a keen appreciation for the depth and variety of southern folk culture. On Johns Island he found something special, a world with a beautiful and flourishing cultural heritage unlike any he had encountered before. He felt it should be shared with many more people and nurtured in a way that would enable it to survive. Yet Johns Island was in the midst of cultural and social transition. How could he, as a visitor, make a contribution to its survival? We would spend the two years we lived • (101) on Johns Island in 1963–65 struggling with that question and trying a variety of projects designed to focus attention on the cultural richness of the

(P. xi-A)

skilled in bad weather. The best of the inhabitable land has been owned by two or three black families since the last half of the nineteenth century. Most of the present inhabitants are related to each other, at least distantly. A few white sportsmen have established hunting lodges on the uninhabited portions of the island, and a land development company has been draining some marshes in order to build waterfront resort homes. At the time of the present study, however, all people present on a daily basis on the island were members of the black community. The island is well-known to residents of Georgetown County, even though few have visited it. It is generally considered to be a mysterious and somewhat backward place. High school students tell of being teased about coming from the island and being looked upon as somehow different and perhaps unsophisticated. Teachers in mainland schools note the close friendships between island children and the in-group humor characteristic of them; some teachers consider their language distinctive, but others do not.

Historically, the economy of the island was based upon rice. Once at least nine major plantations flourished there, worked and probably managed largely by black labor. Few of the white owners made permanent homes on the island, probably no more than two families at any one time. The majority of the land remains in the hands of white individual owners or corporations, but they remain absentee owners. Long after rice had ceased to be a major factor in the rest

7: Jackson L-5 (1973-1976) 1989
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CHAPTER 1

101 The field research on which this dissertation is based resulted from three years of study beginning in July 1973 and continuing through August 1976. In an effort to restrict variational data, the field work was conducted primarily on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, because it is located further off shore and is less urbanized than many of the other Sea Islands. Linguistic research was also conducted on Johns, Edisto, Yongs and James Islands since I was informed by the inhabitants that the language varied from one island to the next. Bennett gives an account of noticeable interisland variation in the early twentieth century:

> There are, especially among the islands, plantations so remote... as once to have developed dialects within the dialect, the characteristic speech and peculiar idioms of one plantation differing so from those of another as to make it very possible for the adept to determine by a negro's peculiarity of dialect what community, sometimes what island...was the spokesman's place. (Bennett 1908:336)

Considering the multilingual history and the geographical inaccessibility of these islands, variation is by no means impossible, though the extent is yet unmeasured.

The Sea Islands are separated from the Atlantic coast and other islands by tidal channels and dense marshland. Before the completion of the bridges connecting several of them to the coast in the 1940's, inter-island communication was limited to a boat which traveled around the islands

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
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GULLAH

Historical Background

101 Even to those familiar with the American Negro through the medium of either life or literature, the term Gullah is a little-known word for a less-known people. It is applied to a special group-type of Negroes, limited historically and geographically to the sea-islands and the narrow tidewater strip bordering the coast counties of South Carolina and Georgia and a small section of north-east Florida. The 197 language spoken by these Negroes constitutes a patois unique among the dialects of the United States, and differs from the more familiar upland Negro dialects as written by Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, as markedly as those dialects differ from the French Creole of Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta.

174 Both the word Gullah and the Negroes so named came 101 from the West Coast of Africa, but exactly where has not been agreed upon. There are two widely-held conjectures. One is that Gullah is a shortened form of Angola, the name of an African West Coast district lying south of the Equator and the mouth of the Congo River.[1] A small but positive bit of evidence to this effect is found in an entry of the Charleston City Council, under the year 1822, in which reference is made to "Gullah Jack" and his company of "Gullah or Angola Negroes." This indicates that, rightly

[1]This was the opinion of Mr. Ambrose E. Gonzales, a high authority on Gullah and author of the Black Border Series of Gullah stories. This was also the view of the Rev. John G. Williams. In the Preface to his *De Old Plantation*, Allendale, 1898, he wrote: "Gullah is very probably a corruption of Angola, shortened to Gola, a country of West Africa, and a part of Lower Guinea, from which a great many negroes were brought to this country in the days of the slave trade. I remember hearing the old plantation negroes before the war speak of one as a 'Gullah nigger' and another as a 'Guinea nigger'. In Appleton's 'New American Cyclopaedia' the Guinea negroes are described as 'black and having thick lips and flat noses', and the Angola, or 'Gulla' negroes as having 'few of the negro peculiarities of form and feature. They are brown in color'. These differences between negroes in the country have been often noticed and remarked upon frequently, the explanation of which differences is that the 'thick lips' and 'flat noses' point to Ashantee and Dahomey as the places from which their ancestors were brought and the 'brown color' and features more like the European in some negroes, very different from the Guineas, point to Angola or 'Gulla' as the country from which their ancestors came. So deeply fixed are the race and even tribal characteristics. There is history in the word 'Gullah', as it is improperly spelt."

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
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or wrongly, as far back as 1822 the official governing body of the City of Charleston regarded Gullah as a corrupted form of Angola.

A second, more probable suggestion is that Gullah comes from the name of the Liberian group of tribes known as Golas living on the West Coast between Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. These Golas were formerly numerous and powerful, but have now dwindled to a small remnant tribe dwelling some thirty miles inland from Monrovia, the chief sea-port of Liberia. "The dialect of the West Coast, from which came these Gullah negroes," says a leading authority[1] on the subject, "was early commented upon as peculiarly harsh, quacking, flat in intonation, quick, clipped, and peculiar even in Africa. Bosman, the Dutch sailor, described its peculiar tonality, and calls its speakers the 'quaquas, because they gabbled like geese'."

Whether originally from Angola or from Liberia, these Gullah tribesmen after their enforced immigration to our shores formed a distinct and peculiar group. Their resolute and persistent nature evidently assisted in impressing their dialectal characteristics on weaker and more plastic Negroes from elsewhere brought in contact with them, and definitely fixed for two hundred years the tonality of the Negro dialect of the Carolina and Georgia coast.[2]

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[1] Mr. John Bennett of Charleston, author of *Master Skylark*, *Madame Margot*, etc., who has been studying the Gullah language and history for a score of years. His article "Gullah: A Negro Patois" (*The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Part I, Oct., 1908; Part II, Jan., 1909) is a most scholarly and penetrating treatment. The present paper draws deeply from it, as also from the work of Mr. Gonzales. Mr. Bennett feels strongly that the Angola derivation for Gullah is quite without foundation; and reiterates his belief in a personal letter to the writer: "God alone knows all the sources of Gullah, (as a language) its vocables, its accents, etc.; but its name came from that odd, primitive people, back of Monrovia, whose name has been spelled various ways, but which, as we have it, is Gullah."

A third derivation, almost certainly wrong, may be mentioned in passing. Rev. Robert Hamill Nassau, M.D., who was for forty years a missionary in the French Congo, thought the Gullahs might come ultimately from a powerful tribe of Caussi or Comi Negroes called Gwalla.

[2] Many of these Negroes were brought to the West Indies and the Carolinas at an early date. The earliest were tempered by servitude in the islands of Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, San Domingo, etc., before arrival in Carolina. Later the untempered Africans were brought direct from the West Coast to Charleston.

An instance of the marked individuality and persistence of Gullah, even under adverse conditions, is told by John G. Williams in *De Ole Plantation*, (Preface p.): "More, perhaps, than a hundred years ago certain negroes were carried from a rice plantation in Colleton County and put on a cotton plantation in Barnwell District,

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
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tural movement and its works of art which have had such profound influence upon the art of the West in the last thirty years; which produced the talking drums, and developed rhythm to a point "two centuries ahead of Europe." [8] It is also significant that the art critics who write concerning the primitive sculpture of Africa call attention to the manner in which the best examples conform to canons that are universal and, according to Louis Carré, apply with equal force to European classic art. It is clearly no matter of accident that the Negroes who composed the Afro-American slave songs came from the very section of Africa which has yielded the finest specimens of sculptural art. Nor can it be considered a coincidence that musicians trained in the tradition of the "three B's" should marvel at the extraordinary feeling for rhythm and musical form shown in the slave compositions—"built on a foundation as solid as that of Bach," as one of them remarked after hearing the Negro singers of St. Simon's.

There seems to be no answer to the question of where the race got its intuitive knowledge of music (which musicians admit is acquired by white students only after years of study) unless we accept the theory advanced by Gobineau, the celebrated French Orientalist, that "the source from which the arts have sprung is concealed in the blood of the blacks"—with the concomitant conclusion that Ham must have been the musically gifted member of Noah's family.

So much for an historical outline of a form of music that is said by Franklin Harris, the composer, to be as distinctive and individual as any in the world.[9] But what of its status today and its chance of survival?

Thirty years ago, when I first visited the coast of Georgia, I would have said it hadn't a ghost of a chance. But now, after seeing what persistence, plus a little money has accomplished, I am not so sure—although I am still certain that those with any interest whatsoever in this music must do more than they have in the past to keep it alive.

When I arrived on St. Simon's in 1912, the stillness of the Negroes was puzzling until questioning brought out the fact that the island was a summer resort, and contact with city whites and their black servants had had its numbing influence; that the old-time singing had gone out of style, and spirituals weren't sung any more. After three musically barren winters I discovered, however, that a few Negroes

[8] *In the words of W. E. Ward. For the complete quotation, see page 16.*
[9] *Call it "hybrid" if you will—but a name cannot alter its right to recognition.*

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I

GULLAH: THE DIALECT OF THE NEGROES OF ST. HELENA ISLAND

INTRODUCTION

THE NEGROES of St. Helena Island speak a dialect which is peculiar to the Negroes of the tidewater section of South Carolina and Georgia.[1] So unusual is the dialect of this area that an up-country person on first hearing it is likely to think that he is listening to a foreign language. It is as different from what is generally thought of as Negro dialect as the speech of the white Georgian is from that of the Chicagoan. With its rapidly spōken phrases, its staccato accents, and its rising and falling intonations, it sounds to the average American more like French or Spanish than any English he has ever heard.

This dialect is known as Gullah, as are also the Negroes who speak it. How the word Gullah came to be so applied cannot be determined satisfactorily. Certainly it has no ethnological significance, for the slaves were not derived from any one tribal group in sufficient numbers

[1] This dialect was first brought to the attention of scholars by such works as Mrs. Caroline Gilman's *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 1837; William Gilmore Simms', *The Wigwam and the Cabin*, 1845, and other stories; and Allen's *Slave Songs of the United States*, 1861. Later writers like Joel Chandler Harris, Mrs. A. M. H. Christensen, and Charles C. Jones published collections of folklore in the dialect. Still later the dialect began to receive some attention for its own sake, chiefly from John Bennett, Ambrose Gonzales, Marcellus S. Whaley, and Reed Smith. The articles by Bennett, published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Oct., 1908, and Jan., 1909, and the recent study by Smith, published as Extension Bulletin No. 190, University of South Carolina, contain the best analyses of the dialect. I have drawn freely from these and other sources for suggestions. For further references to the literature on Gullah, see the bibliography.

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for that group to play an important role. Such evidence as we have, although it is rather meager, seems to indicate that the tribal composition of the slaves was a hodge-podge of a score or more of West and Central African peoples. In the records of the Charleston slave merchants and in the files of *The South Carolina Gazette* will be found statements which prove the diversity of African stocks among the slaves. A recent research reveals that the following African tribes or regions were specifically mentioned in the Charleston slave market:[2] Gambia River, Whidah, Fantee, Coromantine, Bassa, Bance Island, Angola, Bight, Calabar, Messe-Congo, and Ebo.

In an excellent study of the Gullah dialect, Professor Reed Smith, of the University of South Carolina, comments as follows on the probable origin of the term Gullah:[3]

> Both the word Gullah and the Negroes so named came from the West Coast of Africa, but exactly where has not been agreed upon. There are two widely-held conjectures. One is that Gullah is a shortened form of Angola, the name of an African West Coast district lying south of the Equator and the mouth of the Congo River. A small but positive bit of evidence to this effect is found in an entry of the Charleston City Council, under the year

[2] Elizabeth Donnan, "The Slave Trade in South Carolina Before the Revolution." *American Historical Review*, July, 1928. Miss Donnan makes this pertinent comment in a footnote: "It is a puzzling fact that the marked differences between the negro tribes, regarded as so important on their arrival, seem to have been speedily lost sight of. Advertisements of seasoned negroes, in so far as the writer has examined them, seldom emphasize the tribe or African locality from which the negro came; notices of runaway negroes occasionally mention place of origin but frequently do not. The evidence seems also to indicate that country-born negroes had lost all distinguishing characteristics or that the planter had grown oblivious to them with his longer association with the negroes."

[3] *Gullah*, pp. 7-8. The Charleston City Council entry mentioned is probably that found in *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection*, etc., published by A. E. Miller, Charleston, 1822.

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1822, in which reference is made to "Gullah Jack" and his company of "Gullah or Angola Negroes." This indicates that, rightly or wrongly, as far back as 1822 the official governing body of the City of Charleston regarded Gullah as a corrupted form of Angola. 101 174

A second, more probable suggestion is that Gullah comes from the name of the Liberian group of tribes known as the Golas living on the West Coast between Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. These Golas were formerly numerous and powerful, but have now dwindled to a small remnant tribe dwelling some thirty miles inland from Monrovia, the chief sea-port of Liberia.

Mr. John Bennett, who made the first serious study of the history and characteristics of Gullah, held this view. He says:[4] 197 101

> The dialect of the West Coast, from which came these Gullah negroes was early commented upon as peculiarly harsh, quacking, flat in intonation, quick, clipped, and peculiar even in Africa. Bosman, the Dutch sailor, described its peculiar tonality, and calls its speakers the "quaquas, because they gabbled like geese."

Which of these theories is the more plausible is difficult to say. The derivation of the word Gullah is one thing and its usage another. Regardless of its true derivation, it came to be applied, not exclusively to one type of Negro, but to the Negroes of the sea-island and coastal region in general. Any ethnological significance that the word may have had at first was soon lost, and it seems likely that the entry of the Charleston City Council of 1822 represented the prevailing idea as to the derivation of the word. If the Golas were really important, would not the difference between them and the Angolas have become common knowledge after more than a hundred years 101

[4] "Gullah: A Negro Patois." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Oct., 1908. There is room for difference of opinion as to whether the Gullah speech is harsh or quacking. It did not strike me that way at all. (113)

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•101 of slavery? Certainly there is something to be said in favor of the accuracy of the "Gullah or Angola" derivation.

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE GULLAH DIALECT

197 Gullah has been called the most African of any of our Negro dialects, yet it can be traced back in practically every detail to English dialect speech. There has long been a popular belief in this country to the effect that Southern white speech is what it is because of the Negro. This idea needs to be reversed, for both the Negro and the white man in the South speak English as they learned it from the latter's ancestors. An understanding of the historical and cultural factors pertaining to the relations of whites and Negroes in the early days of slavery in South Carolina is essential to an appreciation of the origin of the Gullah dialect. These may be sketched very briefly.

175 Speaking of the environment in which the Gullah dialect was born, Smith says:[5]

(243) (248) (567) 175 567 (178) This section, from Colonial days to the Civil War, was the richest and most cultured of that part of the South. Rice, the chief low-country crop of that day, was extremely lucrative under slave-labor, as was the silky, long-staple sea-island cotton. Large plantations of thousands of acres were the rule, on which the wealthy planters lived in characteristic, often feudal prosperity. . . . Before the war, each plantation was a little world apart. The slaves lived together, segregated in their own special quarters. The Negroes outnumbered the whites in the ratio of tens and hundreds to one, and only the house-servants and body-servants came into close contact with their owners. The large majority of field-hands habitually saw only each other, their overseers, and occa-

[5] *Gullah*, pp. 9-10.